

Hepatitis C

1. What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is a highly contagious (spreads person-to-person) liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus (germ).

- **Acute hepatitis C:** Refers to the first several months after being infected. Most people with acute infection have no symptoms while some may experience serious illness requiring hospitalization. About 1 person in 5 are able to get rid of the virus in the first 6 months.
- **Chronic hepatitis C:** Most people aren't able to get rid of the virus and develop a lifelong infection that stays in the body. Over time, it can cause serious health problems including liver disease, liver failure, and even liver cancer.

2. How does hepatitis C spread?

Hepatitis C usually spreads when blood from an infected person enters the body of someone who is not infected.

The virus can be spread by:

- Sharing needles, syringes, or other equipment to inject drugs
- Getting tattoos and body piercings using non-sterile tools or in informal settings
- Having sex with an infected person
- Being born to a mother with Hepatitis C
- Sharing personal care items like razors or toothbrushes

3. Who is at risk for hepatitis C?

Anyone can get hepatitis C, but you may be at higher risk if you:

- Were born between 1945-1965
- Received donated blood or organs before 1992
- Have ever injected drugs with a needle or syringe
- Have certain medical conditions like HIV or kidney disease
- Have had sexual contact with an infected partner
- Got body piercings or tattoos in informal or unlicensed settings

4. What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

Most people with hepatitis C do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected. Symptoms of acute hepatitis C can appear anytime from 2 weeks to 6 months after infection. Chronic hepatitis C symptoms usually take years to develop and are often a sign of advanced liver disease.

If symptoms of hepatitis C occur, they can include:

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| • Fever | • Vomiting | • Grey stool |
| • Feeling tired | • Stomach pain | • Joint pain |
| • Loss of appetite | • Dark urine | • Yellowing of the skin and eyes |
| • Upset stomach | • (pee) | |



Key Points

- Hepatitis C is a contagious liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus.
- Hepatitis C can spread when the blood from an infected person enters the body of someone who is not infected.
- There is no vaccine for hepatitis C, but it can be prevented.
- Talk to a doctor about testing and treatment for C.

For more information:

Los Angeles County,
Department of Public Health
<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/Diseases/HepC.htm>

California Department of
Public Health
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/HepatitisC.aspx>

Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention (CDC)
<https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/index.htm>

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5. How is hepatitis C treated?

There are new and highly effective drugs available to treat hepatitis C. More than 9 out of 10 people treated may be cured. Talk to a doctor if you have hepatitis C or want to be tested.

6. How can hepatitis C be prevented?

- Don't share or reuse needles, syringes, or other equipment to inject drugs, steroids hormones or other substances
- Don't share personal items like razors, nail clippers, toothbrushes or glucometers
- Don't get tattoos or body piercing from an unlicensed facility or in an informal setting

Should I get Tested for Hepatitis C?

The only way to know if you have hepatitis C is to get a blood test. Testing is recommended for certain groups, including people who:

- Were born from 1945-1965
- Received a blood or organs before 1992
- Have ever injected drugs, even once
- Have certain medical conditions such as HIV, or liver disease
- Have abnormal liver tests
- Have been exposed to blood from a person who has hepatitis C
- Are on hemodialysis (treatment for kidney failure)
- Are born to a mother with hepatitis C